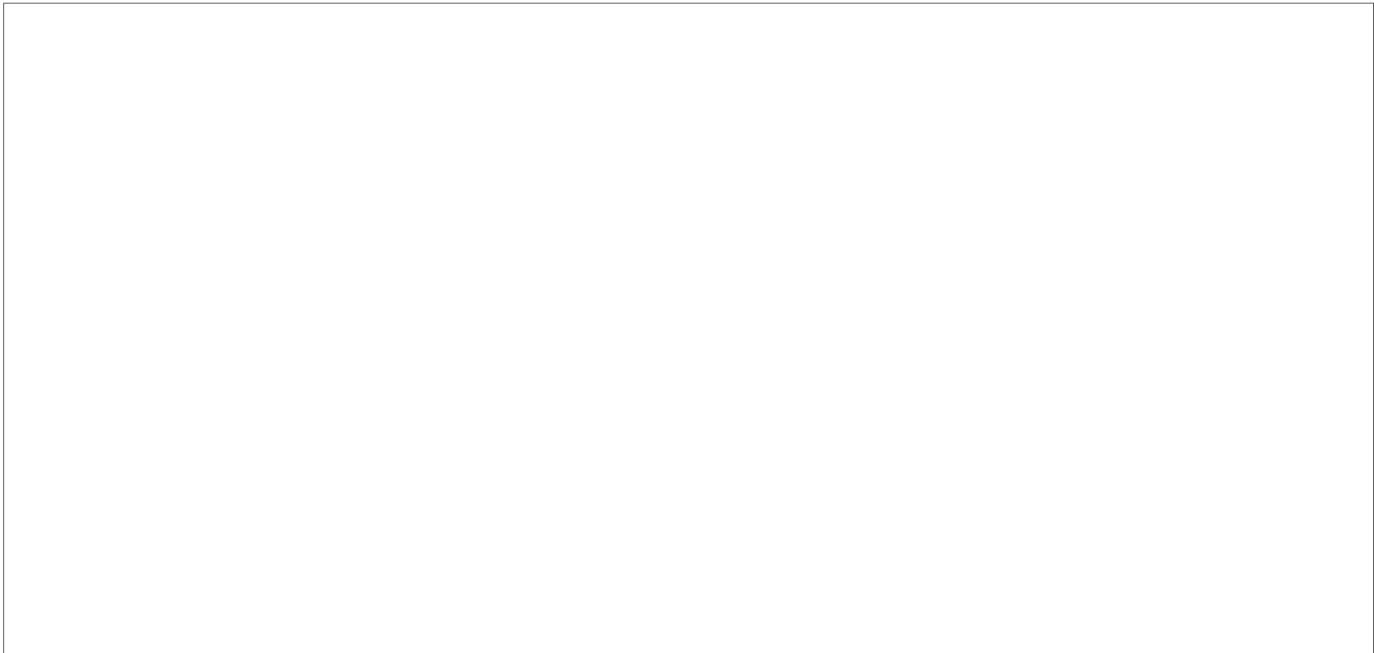


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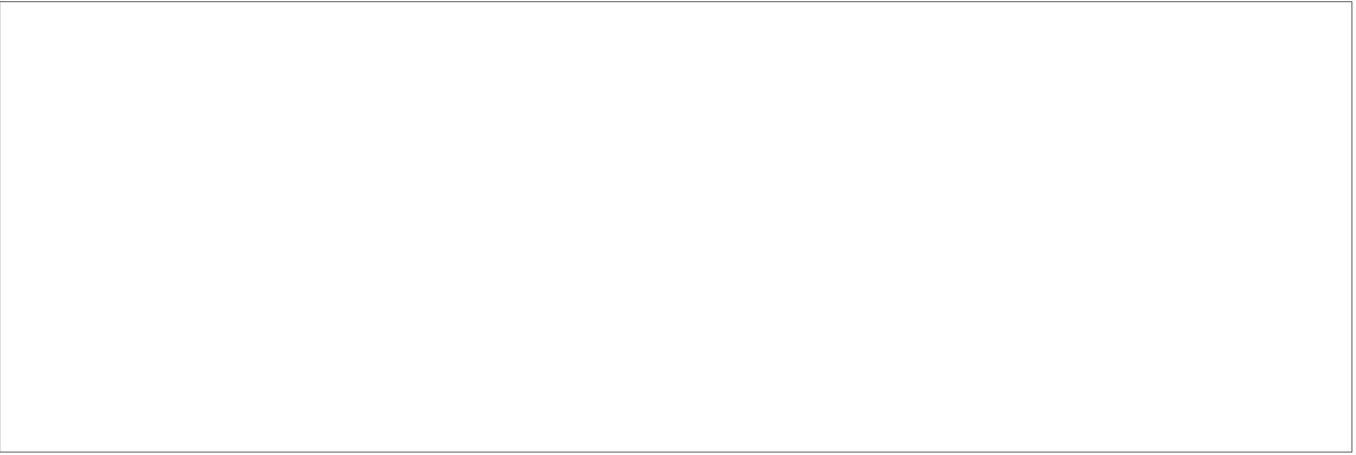
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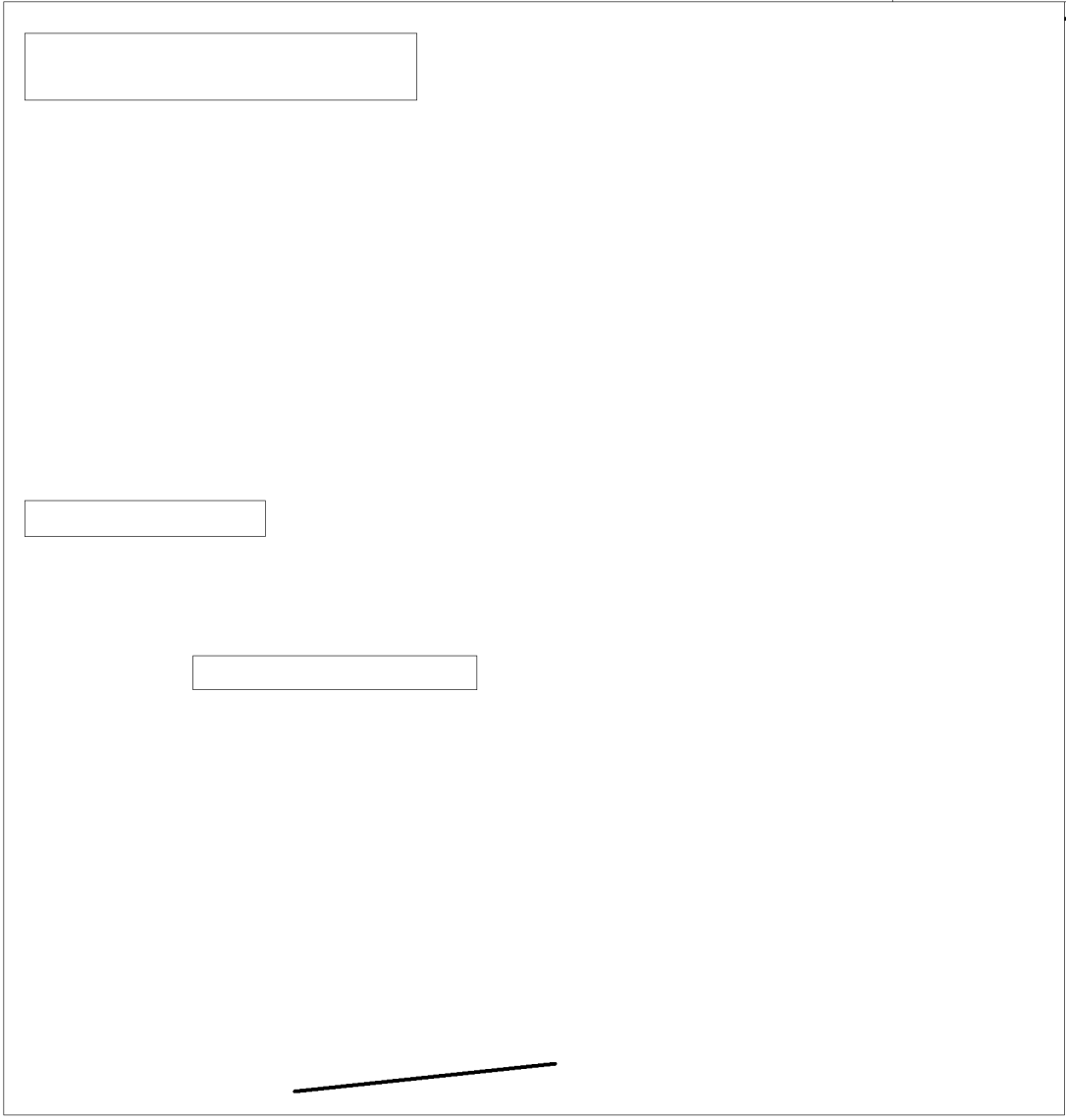
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Summit Debate: How Did U.S. Fare?

The Summit: New Issues

Reagan Performance On Arms Is Debated

By LESLIE H. GELB

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 — The dispute between President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev over what was said at Reykjavik has raised new questions about how astutely President Reagan and his advisers conducted the negotiations and how they have characterized them to the public.

News

Analysis The dispute could affect the President's ability to continue dealing credibly with Moscow on arms control and damage his reputation as a political leader at home.

The immediate issue is what he led the Soviet officials there to believe he might agree to: Was it simply the elimination of all intercontinental ballistic missiles, as he and other top Administration officials now say, or did he go further and react favorably to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal to eliminate all strategic nuclear arms, as the Soviet leader and several Administration officials maintain?

A Dilemma for Reagan

If Mr. Reagan continues to deny that he agreed to the concept of eliminating all long-range nuclear weapons, he risks undercutting his credibility in future arms talks with Moscow.

But if he admits it, he runs afoul of most of his own Administration's military advice and faces charges of vacillation and incompetence. These are precisely the accusations he used to make, and made again today, about President Carter's handling of Soviet-American relations.

Today, in remarks prepared for delivery to a Republican rally in Oklahoma City, Mr. Reagan said he had been under "immense pressure to sign an agreement, to give up hope for developing a defense against ballistic

Continued From Page 1

missiles, simply to have a trophy to wave."

"I'm proud I was able to stand firm for a safer, more secure future," he said.

After a week of conflicting renditions, the White House tried to walk a new line on Thursday. White House spokesman Larry Speakes said Mr. Reagan had discussed the total elimination of nuclear weapons as an "ultimate goal," but that the discussion then ended without an agreement on such a principle.

But Administration officials, legislators, and Eastern bloc diplomats say they doubt this will settle the questions about what really happened in Iceland, and whether Mr. Reagan was prepared for the kind of discussions he entered into. If he was prepared and if he continues to say that Reykjavik represents a major arms control breakthrough, why did he conclude his meeting there with Mr. Gorbachev so abruptly and why were his aides so grim-faced when they left that city?

The question of what was agreed about eliminating nuclear weapons is seen here as fundamental to national security and to perceptions of Mr. Reagan's competence in dealing with Moscow.

Administration military experts have made no secret of their concern about how a nuclear-free world would affect the balance of conventional, non-nuclear forces. European leaders and American diplomats have expressed equal concern about the uncertain effects on foreign policy as well.

But of equal gravity is the fact that Mr. Reagan and Secretary of State George P. Shultz admit having engaged in such negotiations without benefit of expert staff analysis. This concern is amplified by the widening impression here, backed up by considerable testimony from Administration officials, that Mr. Reagan might have actually agreed, or led Mr. Gorbachev to believe he had agreed, to the idea of eliminating all nuclear weapons.

This impression has gained force as Administration officials have, almost daily offered different explanations of what occurred.

Most senior Administration officials continue to assert that Mr. Reagan, Mr. Shultz and the others were prepared for the kind of wide-ranging, free-wheeling negotiations that took place in

Reykjavik. But before the meetings, they all said they expected the bulk of the talks to focus on medium-range missiles and perhaps nuclear testing, issues on which the prospects for formal agreement seemed best.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff more or less publicly made clear that they were caught unawares by the Soviet proposals and had never developed a position on scrapping all strategic nuclear weapons.

Nor does the Administration's current account square with what many of the officials in Mr. Reagan's party told reporters in Iceland. There, the indications were that Mr. Gorbachev's bold proposals had surprised them all.

This is supported by accounts from authoritative diplomatic sources that the Russians gave no hint before Reykjavik of the larger focus that Mr. Gorbachev would pursue at the talks.

But regardless of whether Mr. Reagan and his aides were surprised, the question remains as to what happened when the four men — Mr. Reagan, Mr. Shultz, Mr. Gorbachev and Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze — were alone in the main room of Hofdi House, their meeting-place in Reykjavik. That encounter can now be reconstructed to some degree because of a press guidance document provided Thursday to The Times, by interviews with officials who received briefings, and by Soviet accounts.

During their Iceland meetings, staff experts were being consulted from time to time and written documents were being exchanged. But mostly, the four men were talking alone, and none of the four can claim to be expert in arms control. Mr. Reagan, at least, does not speak with precision on these

subjects, and Mr. Shultz is said still not to have mastered the details.

That said, the Soviet leaders had their American counterparts at a disadvantage; they knew they would make a surprising proposal for 50 percent cuts in all strategic arms, and they might well have been prepared beforehand to go on from there.

The ball started rolling. The Russians called for 50 percent cuts in ballistic missiles over five years plus a 10-year ban on deploying space-based defenses. The Americans countered by agreeing to this in general terms, then proposing to go further and eliminate all ballistic missiles in the succeeding five years. Then, the Russians increased the bidding by proposing to include not only ballistic missiles, but long-range bombers and cruise missiles as well.

At that point, according to the press guidance, Mr. Reagan "indicated that elimination of all nuclear weapons had always been his goal," and the "discussion then went on to" the Antiballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 and the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Did Mr. Gorbachev take this for agreement on the goal of nuclear disarmament? Did Mr. Reagan actually go further and state agreement?

Briefings by Mr. Shultz and other Administration officials immediately after the event were confusing.

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